Thatcher climate warning inspires festival's journey into the future

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Margaret Thatcher's apocalyptic warning 33 years ago about the dangers of climate change is expected to be at the heart of one of the country's most adventurous cultural projects.

Details have been revealed of a weeklong story played out on multiple platforms and across the breadth of Wales, culminating in a live television broadcast as part of a £120 million festival celebrating British creativity.

Galwad, one of ten projects selected for the government-funded Unboxed festival, will bring together hundreds of people to create a story that from September 26 will play out on various digital platforms and move from Swansea to Merthyr Tydfil, finishing in the Snowdonia village of Blaenau Ffestiniog.

The story focuses on Efa, a Swansea schoolgirl who has "her 46-year-old mind from 2052 in her 16-year-old body". It will culminate in a four-hour Sky Arts broadcast including a 60- minute live drama set in the future.

Organisers say there will be "unannounced interventions" on S4C, the

Welsh-language channel, while Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok will all be deployed.

Alex McDowell, the production designer on the influential Tom Cruise thriller Minority Report, has been brought in to help to build the new "world" which is dealing with the consequences of a 1.8C temperature rise. It will "ask what would happen if the future tried to contact us".

Claire Doherty, Galwad's creative director, said they were "pushing the boundaries of what happens when you combine theatre drama, digital storytelling and social media", with audiences moving across platforms to consume stories in different ways.

Owen Sheers, the novelist and poet, is leading a 16-strong team of writers.

He said that while "the process is complex, hopefully the outcome is simple", adding: "It will be one story across Wales in a week on multiple platforms. There are networks of creatives, new ways of collaborating and there are seeds in this story which could be the future of broadcast storytelling."

Sheers said that while discussions on social feeds about climate change were "doom-laden", it was "vital to have a story that is also packed through with solutions".

He cited as an inspiration Thatcher's speech to the UN on climate change in 1989, when she warned of the dangers of land degradation, water pollution and "adding greenhouse gases to the air at an unprecedented rate".

Sheers said this week of Thatcher's speech: "It had all the answers in it, all the solutions, all the urgency.

"It could have been written by Extinction Rebellion. It is vital to show this is not a partisan issue."

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